

TESTIMONY OF BRENDAN MCQUADE
Neither for Nor Against Proposed Legislation—LD 512

An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027

Submitted to the

The Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee and the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee

February 7, 2025

Before the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee and the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and other members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, and Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Brendan McQuade. I am an associate professor at the University of Southern Maine, where I also serve as the chair of both the Sociology and Criminology departments. I reside in Portland.

I appear before you today not to support or oppose the Governor's proposed budget but to stress the urgent need for deeper investment in the University of Maine System. We appreciate the Governor's proposal to increase state appropriations to the system by four percent—this is a step in the right direction. However, after years of chronic underfunding, we implore this Committee and the Legislature to dig deeper and secure additional funding that is directly targeted to benefit students.

The departments I chair are both critically understaffed. Criminology has over one hundred majors but only three full-time faculty members. Sociology has forty-two majors and just two full-time faculty members, who are shared with other departments. Both departments have been severely impacted by retirements, hiring freezes, and job searches that were halted due to budgetary constraints. Moreover, faculty have left for higher-paying positions at institutions that are no more prestigious than USM, exacerbating our staffing crisis.

As a result, we are in a constant state of triage, struggling to provide students with the quality education and mentorship they deserve. Instead, we are forced to focus solely on moving students through their programs while managing the most immediate and pressing challenges.

In the Criminology department, where I am most directly involved, we have ambitious plans that remain unrealized due to a lack of faculty. We would like to launch prison education programs to support incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students. We

hope to revive study-abroad opportunities—our department once sent students to Sweden to examine different legal systems and engage with professionals and scholars abroad. Additionally, the administration has encouraged us to develop a Master's program in Legal Studies in partnership with Maine Law. This program would serve professionals who work with the law but do not need a J.D., such as human resource specialists and professionals in the criminal legal system who require a graduate degree for career advancement. Leadership at both USM and Maine Law see this as a financially viable program that would generate revenue for the University of Maine System. Yet, these initiatives remain indefinitely on hold due to unfulfilled hiring promises.

If the state is serious about supporting public higher education, it must move beyond stopgap measures and commit to sustained, meaningful investment. Without additional resources, we cannot retain faculty, develop programs, or provide students with the opportunities they need to thrive. The four percent increase in appropriations is a welcome gesture, but it is not enough to reverse the long-term damage of chronic underfunding. We urge you to prioritize higher education funding and ensure that these resources are directed toward hiring and supporting faculty, expanding academic programs, and enhancing student success.

Thank you for your time and consideration.